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Programme questions: evaluation

## Triennial review of recommendations from the programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

### Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) recommendations three years after the Committee had decided to endorse them (see A/37/38, para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which the five recommendations emanating from the (OIOS) programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) were implemented.

In the recommendations, OIOS addressed various aspects of ESCWA relevance and effectiveness in implementing its mandate. At the conclusion of its fifty-seventh session, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in the OIOS evaluation report. The triennial review determined that four recommendations (recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 5) were implemented, while one recommendation (recommendation 2) was partially implemented. Some evidence of immediate results was noted in relation to the implementation of the four recommendations. However, the long-term impact could not yet be established.

In recommendation 1, OIOS addressed the need for ESCWA to strengthen its capacity to address newly emerging priority issues in the region and unplanned requests for support by creating a means for more regular and systematic dialogue and consultation with member States. The Executive Committee regularly considered emerging issues and had the flexibility to consider unplanned requests for support. This recommendation was implemented.

\* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

\*\* E/AC.51/2020/1.



In recommendation 2, OIOS addressed the need for ESCWA to implement recommendations resulting from its current publications reform and to further strengthen the utility of its publications by developing and implementing a comprehensive publications strategy. While significant progress was made in strengthening the utility of its publications, due to changes in senior management, a comprehensive publications strategy had not been adopted and issued. This recommendation was partially implemented.

In recommendation 3, OIOS addressed the need for ESCWA to strengthen its methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting on programme performance data in order to better address the longer-term outcomes of its three core functions and to more effectively demonstrate the linkages between them. ESCWA established an internal work portal that allowed it to collect, analyse and report on programme performance data and an online meetings system that allowed it to collect and analyse information about all meetings and workshops organized by ESCWA. This recommendation was implemented.

In recommendation 4, OIOS addressed the need for ESCWA to develop a detailed strategy and action plan for strengthening the linkages between its three core functions of consensus-building, research and analysis, and advisory services. In lieu of the recommended action plan or strategy, ESCWA moved directly to implement the spirit of the recommendation and amended the planning instructions to reflect a requirement to integrate the core functions and respective lines into single results-oriented plans. This recommendation was implemented.

In recommendation 5, OIOS addressed the need to further enhance its capacity to implement the Sustainable Development Goals strategy by proposing options to increase the support provided to member States on mainstreaming, implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in national development planning processes. ESCWA established a dedicated unit on the 2030 Agenda to ensure a coherent response to the needs of ESCWA member States regarding the 2030 Agenda, including support to the voluntary national reviews and other capacity development activities. This recommendation was implemented.

## I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-seventh session, in 2017, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, on the evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) ([E/AC.51/2017/4](#)).
2. The Committee expressed appreciation for the report and the positive overall assessment of the work of ESCWA. In paragraphs 121 to 130 its report ([A/72/16](#)), the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 58 to 62 of the OIOS report.
3. The present report was issued pursuant to a triennial review of the recommendations and serves to examine the status of implementation of the five recommendations contained in the evaluation. The review also addressed, where possible, the extent to which implementation of the recommendations contributed to programme changes.
4. The methodology for the triennial review included:
  - (a) Review and analysis of the biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendations database;
  - (b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from ESCWA on various topics related to the recommendations;
  - (c) Remote interviews conducted with a purposive sample of ESCWA staff.
5. The present report incorporates comments received from ESCWA during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with ESCWA for its formal comments, which are contained in the annex. OIOS expresses its appreciation to ESCWA for the cooperation it extended in the preparation of the present report.

## II. Results

6. Based on the results of the evaluation report, OIOS made five recommendations to ESCWA: (a) to strengthen capacity to address newly emerging issues; (b) to develop and implement a comprehensive publications strategy; (c) to strengthen methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting on programme performance; (d) to develop a detailed strategy and action plan for strengthening linkages between the Commission's three core functions; and (e) to propose options for increasing the support provided to member States for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
7. In its review and based on the information collected, OIOS determined that four of the five recommendations were implemented (recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 5), while one (recommendation 2) was partially implemented. There is some evidence of concrete positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations. The implementation status of each of the five recommendations is described below.

### **Recommendation 1** **Emerging priority issues in the region**

8. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:
 

ESCWA should strengthen its capacity to address newly emerging priority issues in the region and unplanned requests for support by creating a means for more

regular systematic dialogue and consultation with member States, including through the Executive Committee.

**Indicator of achievement:** Discussion of emerging issues at sessions of the Executive Committee or other intergovernmental body.

9. In response to the recommendation, ESCWA ensured that emerging and priority issues were on the agenda at every Executive Committee meeting. The agenda of each meeting was developed through an iterative process, during which the secretariat first prepared a draft agenda, which was then modified by the Chair of the Committee, representing member States. The process ensured that issues of importance to member States were appropriately reflected. Staff interviews and a review of records confirmed that the agenda was then sent out to member States at least six weeks in advance, with relevant documentation. Member States could suggest discussion of other urgent or priority issues prior to, or at the time of, the adoption of the agenda. The issues did not have to be from the ESCWA programme of work as long as they were related to an area of ESCWA expertise.<sup>1</sup>

10. Document review confirmed that, at every Executive Committee meeting since the OIOS evaluation, emerging and priority issues had been considered. For example:

(a) At the 4th Executive Committee meeting, held in December 2017, regional and global issues discussed included: a proposal for establishing an Arab centre for climate policies; an ESCWA vision for a multimodal transport system in the Arab region; and the economic cost of violence against women;

(b) At the 5th Executive Committee meeting, held in December 2018, regional and global issues discussed included: the Palestinian economy under occupation: the case of the industrial sector; supporting Arab States in the periodic review of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 years after their adoption; and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and its relevance to the Arab region;

(c) At the 6th Executive Committee meeting, held in June 2019, topics included: the social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls; rethinking barriers to women's economic participation in the Arab region; and multidimensional poverty;

(d) At the 6th special Executive Committee meeting, held in November 2019, regional and global issues discussed included "Financing for development in 2019: global developments and regional challenges", as reflected in the Arab financing for development scorecard; economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation and coping mechanisms of the Palestinian people; and "Climate change: regional and global developments".

11. In addition, ESCWA had a new mandate to host at least one annual meeting of the Technical Cooperation Network, in conjunction with planned meetings of the Executive Committee. In general, Network meetings were held back-to-back with Executive Committee meetings. The Network was a forum in which member States could discuss and identify areas of common interest for technical cooperation, thus allowing for scalability of interventions. It also allowed for the sharing of best

<sup>1</sup> The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) notes that this approach is in line with the terms of reference of the Executive Committee. In September 2014, ESCWA adopted resolution 320 (XXVIII) on redesignating the Technical Committee as the "Executive Committee" and amending its terms of reference. The Executive Committee held its first meeting in June 2015. By the same resolution, ESCWA changed the terms of reference to empower the Executive Committee to facilitate direct communication between the secretariat and member States on development, economic and social issues by convening its meetings every six months (see E/ESCWA/2015/EC.1/8/Report, para.1).

practices and lessons learned. Staff interviews confirmed that the regular venue was a forum in which emerging and urgent technical cooperation issues could be raised and considered. The outcome of the discussions could then be provided to the Executive Committee for endorsement or further recommendation.

12. This recommendation was implemented.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **Publications reform**

13. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

ESCWA should implement the recommendations resulting from its current publications reform and further strengthen the utility of its publications by developing and implementing a comprehensive publications strategy that includes guidelines on dissemination, communication and advocacy, as well as performance indicators and feedback mechanisms to regularly track progress, including targets on clientele and distribution.

**Indicator of achievement:** Recommendations from reform implemented and a publications strategy document with target dates for implementation of each component.

14. In responding to the OIOS recommendation, and in line with its own internal publication self-evaluation recommendations, ESCWA organized five focus group discussions and undertook several in-house consultations to finalize a draft publication strategy, which included guidelines and templates for the preparation and dissemination of publications. However, due to significant changes in senior management, the draft was not approved by the Publications Committee. As a result, work was under way to create a new publications strategy that would focus on solutions, complementarities and cohesiveness.

15. Despite the lack of an approved publications strategy, ESCWA had made significant progress towards addressing publication utility through its work in implementing other recommendations arising from its internal publication self-evaluation. Significant efforts were made to improve the dissemination and reach of ESCWA publications. For example, ESCWA created a revised template for concept notes that was rolled out on 1 January 2018. It included details on dissemination and communications plans, data plans, quality control and partnership. ESCWA also produced a tool to plan and update information on publications and content to improve its online presence. The tool was updated on a weekly basis and served to ensure that deadlines were updated and met. ESCWA also automatically sent out email notifications of new ESCWA publications to an updated, division-maintained, collective mailing list, as well as a global mailing list that included think tanks, universities and research centres. In 2018, 37 publications were disseminated through the new system. In 2019, the total was 66 publications. The email directed recipients back to the ESCWA website so that downloads could be tracked and viewers had access to other ESCWA publications.

16. In order to facilitate access to publications online, ESCWA regularly updated the Official Document System. Given that the system was not open to search engines, in 2018, ESCWA joined the United Nations Digital Library<sup>2</sup> and exported all ESCWA documents to that platform. The Digital Library was easily accessible to all search engines and, in 2019, it generated 3 million hits. ESCWA also entered into an agreement with the EBSCO knowledge portal, making all ESCWA publications since

<sup>2</sup> The ESCWA page of the United Nations Digital Library is available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&cc=ESCWA>.

1974 accessible through it.<sup>3</sup> Each month, ESCWA provided EBSCO with 10 free publications, as well as a list of new publications that linked back to its website. Over 2,000 organizations subscribed to the EBSCO databases, and staff interviews indicated that it was anticipated that the agreement would generate a significant number of additional hits for ESCWA publications. In 2019, ESCWA entered into a partnership with an Arab women's organization, under which all gender-related ESCWA publications were added to the organization's open access electronic library.<sup>4</sup> Publications from 2016 to 2019 were also added to Google Scholar for more visibility, and 100 per cent of all material was being electronically published.

17. In terms of further enhancing awareness and visibility of its publications, in 2017, ESCWA prepared a draft communications plan that assessed challenges and opportunities and proposed actions to improve the content and workflow of its publications. In parallel, ESCWA launched a social media strategy on 1 November 2017 to increase the visibility of its activities and access to content. The strategy called for regular posting, concise and consistent messaging in Arabic and English, and the use of visuals in almost every post. The use of visuals in social media, for example, videos, infographics, short spots, interviews and vacancy openings, had increased social media engagement. In two years, ESCWA had increased its number of followers on Twitter by 340 per cent – from just under 3,000 to 10,000 – and on Facebook by 140 per cent – from just under 16,000 “likes” to 22,000. In 2019, it also established an Instagram account. ESCWA had also introduced a media calendar in the last quarter of 2019 to manage content in a more structured and strategic manner and to ensure alignment with the overall objectives of ESCWA. Staff interviews confirmed that the media calendar had resulted in a more cohesive and strategic outlook towards media. At the same time, ESCWA participated in a three-day annual knowledge fair in 2019, with 250 member State representatives from around the region further enhancing the visibility of its publications.

18. ESCWA communicated key messages in one coherent and unified voice. All social media content on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube went through the media team. To ensure high-quality content, ESCWA hired dedicated staff, such as a language expert, a videographer, a larger graphics team and consultants who helped develop storytelling approaches. They also provided one-on-one assistance to create more compelling narratives of technical work that could have a greater impact and created infographics and communications campaigns in Arabic and English. ESCWA has also opened a small studio on its premises. In 2018, ESCWA developed a series of short clips that communicated main findings and key messages to the public in simple terms, as well as 23 infographics about ESCWA research, in English and Arabic, that were disseminated to policymakers, experts and civil society during meetings and events organized by ESCWA. Topics included, for example, illicit financial flows, women's political representation, fiscal policy and food security.<sup>5</sup> Staff interviews indicated that visual content had dramatically improved in quality due to the increased resources devoted to the improvements.

19. In terms of the ESCWA website, changes were made to the layout of the publications web page to increase social optimization. The Sustainable Development

<sup>3</sup> EBSCO is a leading provider of research databases, e-journals, magazine subscriptions, e-books and a discovery service to libraries of all kinds. For more than 70 years, it has partnered with libraries to improve research with quality content and technology. The website of the discovery service is available at: [www.ebsco.com/products/ebsco-discovery-service](http://www.ebsco.com/products/ebsco-discovery-service).

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://elibrary.arabwomenorg.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> Videos are available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie7o3hPINcg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie7o3hPINcg) (illicit financial flows); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nk1THGxL6yY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nk1THGxL6yY) (women's political representation); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1cbxFv56qQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1cbxFv56qQ) (fiscal policy); and [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaN\\_Ox7YLqU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaN_Ox7YLqU) (food security).

Goals were embedded as a mandatory metafield and were tagged to all the publications produced in the period 2015–2019. Efforts were also undertaken to make the page more visible to search engines. A web governance policy and branding guidelines were also issued. According to staff interviews, they resulted in the realignment of numerous previously disparate websites into uniform and branded websites in Arabic that also allowed for the tracking of downloads.

20. In the same vein, ESCWA had provided training to enhance staff capacity towards enhancing dissemination and awareness of ESCWA products. The training topics included: talking to the media; writing skills in Arabic; writing skills in English; and photography. Regular photography training sessions were held, particularly on cell phone photography. Staff interviews indicated that the training had resulted in higher-quality submissions and photographs from staff members that could be utilized for social media activities and, therefore, contributed to more effectively disseminating ESCWA publication messages.

21. While ESCWA has made significant progress towards implementing this recommendation, strengthening the utility of its publication work, as well as its visibility, due to the lack of a final comprehensive publications strategy that authoritatively guides these actions, as called for by the evaluation, this recommendation was partially implemented.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### **Strengthening methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting on programme performance data**

22. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

ESCWA should strengthen its methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting on programme performance data in order to better address the longer-term outcomes of its three core functions and to more effectively demonstrate the linkages between them.

**Indicator of achievement:** Enhanced programme performance system with clear methodologies and data collection tools.

23. In responding to the OIOS recommendation, ESCWA expanded its planning methodology so that it would more ably strengthen its programme performance mechanisms. The actions taken included the development of longer-term strategic plans and the provision of results-based management training, which focused on the development of results frameworks, theory of change and other results-based management methodologies.

24. In addition, ESCWA developed an internal work planning portal in which it could tag Sustainable Development Goals and other indicators to programmatic performance. Correspondingly, each division was tasked with tagging relevant indicators and Goals when beginning to implement the work and then again when producing the assessments. Through a business analytics tool that provided interactive visualizations and business intelligence capabilities, ESCWA had developed a process by which it had been able to link the internal work planning portal to the Umoja Enterprise Core Component to combine programmatic performance information with financial performance. With that capability, ESCWA was able to regularly produce implementation rate reports for senior management. The process was fully functional for the 2018–2019 biennium.

25. Given the experience of ESCWA in the area, it worked closely with the Umoja team to pilot a management application on strategic planning, budgeting and performance management that could put together programme and financial information for results-based monitoring. ESCWA also worked with the Umoja team

on an annual results framework performance dashboard, which was expected to allow for the monitoring of programme performance through such variables as entity, budget, period, deliverables and results. ESCWA was also appointed Co-Chair of the working group on budget and expense tracking on gender equality of the High-level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality established by the Secretary-General because of its experience in combining programmatic and financial information using markers.

26. In addition, ESCWA created a programme quality unit, which began work in 2017. The unit was created in response to the OIOS evaluation and began work on a programme quality system, which was to be a concise, operational quality management system to strengthen methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting data on programme performance. To that end, the unit developed an online meetings portal that was launched in 2018 and served as a centrally managed system that collected information on all meetings and workshops organized by ESCWA, including demographics of participants, venue, spending and evaluations carried out after the final report of the meeting or workshop had been produced. Analysis of and reporting on meetings took place and was shared with the meeting organizers. The unit developed guidelines for the online meetings system that provided step-by-step information on its use. The guidelines were circulated to all staff with the aim of more efficiently managing meetings, minimizing duplication and maintaining records in a centralized location. Staff interviews confirmed that the system allowed for a better coordinated process for organizing meetings and collecting relevant information, as well as ensuring that all meeting documentation was stored in a single repository.

27. This recommendation was implemented.

#### **Recommendation 4**

##### **Strategy and action plan for strengthening linkages between its three core functions**

28. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

ESCWA should develop a detailed strategy and action plan for strengthening the linkages between its three core functions of consensus-building, research and analysis, and advisory services. The action plan should clearly define activities, time frames, authority and accountability for the steps to be taken to enhance these linkages. It should be developed with consideration given to the already developed ESCWA strategy on the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Indicator of achievement:** Action plan with follow-up mechanism for all functional areas.

29. In response to the recommendation, ESCWA put in place several separate mechanisms through which linkages could be strengthened between its core functions. For instance, it developed a “strategic planning and visioning checklist” with accompanying guidance that encouraged users to think of the core functions in a mutually reinforcing way. ESCWA also prepared a document on strategic planning from 2014 to the present to inform medium- and long-term planning. The document had been updated every biennium since that time, including following the issuance of the OIOS recommendation and for the preparation of the 2020 budget.

30. In developing its workplans, ESCWA put together a planning support package and materials for the design of results-oriented work programmes, as well as an Excel sheet template for guidance. The guidance focused on a results-based planning process that leveraged resources through the integration of all budget lines and collaboration among subprogrammes. In interviews, staff indicated that the planning guidance built on the complementarity between budget accounts and ESCWA core



functions, for example, the United Nations Development Account, which was associated with capacity-building (research and analysis function), the regular programme of technical cooperation, which was associated with technical assistance (advisory services function) and the regular budget, which was associated with normative and intergovernmental work (consensus-building function). Document review showed that the guidance note emphasized that outputs should use the full spectrum of activities, including normative, capacity-building and technical cooperation, ensuring that they were well linked to the relevant result.<sup>6</sup> Staff interviews confirmed that the planning format used for 2020 had been useful in developing cohesive initial plans.

31. In addition, ESCWA used its internal work planning portal to enable the production of on-demand monitoring reports on regular budget, Development Account and regular programme of technical cooperation deliverables, which were all tied to a result and performance markers, including the Sustainable Development Goals, and could be matched with cost tracking in the Umoja Enterprise Core Component. The portal allowed ESCWA to review the quality and results of the expert group meetings, intergovernmental meetings, workshops and technical cooperation missions to see progress in the creation of linkages between the three core functions. Staff interviews confirmed that the portal assisted ESCWA in understanding all aspects of its work, its impact and what could have been done differently.

32. ESCWA also produced annual reports on technical cooperation for its intergovernmental bodies, which focused on the links between different accounts, the results achieved through the complementarity of each account and how they were built to influence tangible changes in government practice or legislation.

33. In lieu of the recommended action plan or strategy, ESCWA moved directly to implement the spirit of the recommendation and amended the planning instructions to reflect a requirement to integrate the core functions and respective lines into single results-oriented plans. ESCWA succeeded in addressing the essence of the recommendation by integrating the three core functions into all subprogrammes. ESCWA formulated its subsequent expected accomplishments in the strategic frameworks, shifting from the formulation of the expected accomplishments around a single function to formulating them around the results that were achieved by optimizing the complementarity and integration of the three core functions and their respective budgets.

34. This recommendation was implemented.

### **Recommendation 5**

#### **Support to member States to implement the Sustainable Development Goals**

35. Recommendation 5 reads as follows:

ESCWA should further enhance its capacity to implement the Sustainable Development Goals strategy by proposing options to increase the support provided to member States on mainstreaming, implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in national development planning processes. In implementing this recommendation, consideration should be given to establishing dedicated capacity and resources for supporting the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Indicator of achievement:** Options on strengthening member State capacity to implement the Sustainable Development Goals at the regional and national levels, including through national development plans.

<sup>6</sup> Guidance Note: ESCWA Annual Plan and Budget 2020.

36. To address the recommendation, ESCWA established a unit focused on the 2030 Agenda, which was strengthened with dedicated resources to support implementation and monitoring (see [A/70/794](#)). As of 2019, the unit had non-staff resources of \$635,500 and a three-year Development Account project fund of \$599,000 (due to end in March 2020), and it had four staff in the Professional and higher categories (one Regional Adviser, half-time (P-5), one P-4 and two P-3 staff) and one in the General Service and related categories (G-7). In addition, it had one staff member (G-5) on loan, one P-5 staff member (half-time) and several consultants and individual contractors.

37. The unit was set up to ensure a coherent response to the needs of ESCWA member States regarding the 2030 Agenda and to enhance the ability of ESCWA to lead regional-level processes to foster intraregional dialogue, advocate for common regional prioritization within the new global agenda and fulfil the mandates of the regional commissions for follow-up and review.<sup>7</sup> The unit coordinated and, as appropriate, complemented, the work of ESCWA divisions. In response to global and regional mandates on the 2030 Agenda, the unit generally undertook activities in relation to regional follow-up and review; stakeholder engagement; capacity-building and technical support. The three-year Development Account project, implemented by the unit, had the overlying components of knowledge-building, capacity-building and regional dialogue, as well as country support. In addition, the ESCWA steering committee to support the work of the unit continued and enhanced complementarity, strengthened ownership and engaged all subprogrammes in ESCWA activities related to the 2030 Agenda.

38. In terms of regional follow-up and review, the unit provided support to the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. Specifically, it supported the ESCWA commitment to lead a participatory process for planning and development of the Forum. The unit led the preparation and coordination of the Arab sustainable development report, which was established in response to a resolution adopted by the Executive Committee on 15 December 2015, in which the Committee requested the secretariat to present periodic reports on monitoring progress made in the Arab region towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the preparation of regional follow-up reports using official data.<sup>8</sup> The first report was produced in 2015 and, although it was anticipated that the reports would be produced every four years, as of the time of the present triennial review, and owing to the launch of the English and Arabic versions of the report, the second report was planned to be launched in early 2020.<sup>9</sup>

39. In terms of stakeholder engagement, the unit organized a number of events for member State parliamentarians, including a 2017 regional seminar for parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the Islamic Development Bank<sup>10</sup> and a 2019 Arab region parliamentary forum on the 2030 Agenda, which built on the outcomes of the regional seminar.<sup>11</sup> The unit also engaged with civil society by supporting the organization of a regional meeting of civil society on sustainable development in the

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<sup>7</sup> Terms of reference of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda.

<sup>8</sup> Executive Committee resolution 322 (EC.2) (December 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Arab sustainable development reports are available at: [www.unescwa.org/about-escwa/regional-coordination-mechanism/working-groups/2030-agenda-sustainable-development/ara-0](http://www.unescwa.org/about-escwa/regional-coordination-mechanism/working-groups/2030-agenda-sustainable-development/ara-0).

<sup>10</sup> Information on the regional seminar is available at: [www.unescwa.org/events/seminar-parliaments-arab-2030-agenda](http://www.unescwa.org/events/seminar-parliaments-arab-2030-agenda).

<sup>11</sup> Information on the parliamentary forum is available at: [www.unescwa.org/events/2019-arab-parliamentary-forum-2030-agenda](http://www.unescwa.org/events/2019-arab-parliamentary-forum-2030-agenda).

Arab region in 2018.<sup>12</sup> The meeting was led by civil society networks and coalitions, and the key messages fed into the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development in 2018. In the same vein, the unit supported the preparatory civil society meeting preceding the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development in 2019.

40. In terms of capacity-building, technical support and knowledge-building, the unit continued to design and deliver several workshops on the 2030 Agenda that catered to the needs of member States. For example, it held a workshop in 2016 to support national efforts on the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda in the State of Palestine; a training workshop on national adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Sudan; and in 2018, a workshop in Jordan on the Sustainable Development Goals and implementation mechanisms at the national level, focusing on the role of the working group on human rights and freedoms. In collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the unit had also provided technical support on the voluntary national review process to Egypt (2016), Morocco (2016), Jordan (2017), Bahrain (2018), Lebanon (2018), Iraq (2019) and Oman (2019). Staff interviews indicated that the result of the activities had increased member State engagement on the Goals, as evidenced by an increasing number of countries in the Arab region that had requested technical assistance and had voluntarily reported on the Goals. In 2017, two States volunteered for the voluntary national review (Jordan and Qatar); eight States volunteered in 2018 (Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and State of Palestine) and six States volunteered in 2019 (Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman and Tunisia). In addition, the unit provided substantive input on activities led by other divisions that focused on the Goals. For example, it provided support to a regional capacity-building workshop for members of the subcommittee on gender and the Sustainable Development Goals organized by the ESCWA Centre for Women in 2018<sup>13</sup> and a regional workshop on leaving no one behind that focused on disability assessment and determination as a means of better inclusion of persons with disabilities in Arab countries in 2019. The unit also translated existing knowledge materials on the Goals into Arabic and made them available online. For example, the *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews* (2018 and 2019 editions) prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs had been translated and an online knowledge hub, the Arab gateway for Sustainable Development Goals, was under construction and was expected to be launched in the first quarter of 2020. Staff interviews confirmed that the unit had filled a gap in regional coordination in relation to the 2030 Agenda.

41. In addition, in 2017, ESCWA launched work on three Sustainable Development Goal clusters using a nexus approach: (a) water, energy and food security; (b) equality, inclusion and justice; and (c) poverty reduction, decent work and sustainable growth. In the same vein, it developed a guidance note and draft methodology on cluster mapping of the Goals, target screening and target relations, which was presented at the ministerial session. The approach had been reflected in the work of the subprogrammes for 2017 and for the period 2018–2019 and was supported by programme budget implication funds approved by the General Assembly (see [A/70/794](#)). As work on the clusters continued, there was some notable progress to report. For example, under the poverty reduction, decent work and sustainable growth cluster, a pilot initiative was undertaken in collaboration with the International Labour Organization to create awareness and strengthen capacity in member States to engage in national sustainable development initiatives by linking

<sup>12</sup> Information on the regional meeting is available at: [www.unescwa.org/events/meeting-arab-civil-society-sustainable-development](http://www.unescwa.org/events/meeting-arab-civil-society-sustainable-development).

<sup>13</sup> Information on the workshop is available at: [www.unescwa.org/events/regional-capacity-building-workshop-members-sub-committee-gender-and-sdgs-voluntary-national](http://www.unescwa.org/events/regional-capacity-building-workshop-members-sub-committee-gender-and-sdgs-voluntary-national).

decent work with inclusive growth. Under the equality, inclusion and justice cluster, ESCWA produced a technical paper in 2017 entitled “Intergenerational justice: meeting the needs of future Arab generations” (E/ESCWA/SDD/2017/Technical Paper.3). In the paper, ESCWA proposed policy options to member States and described a toolkit it had developed on mainstreaming social justice in development plans, policies and programmes that clarified the social justice dimension of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In interviews, staff indicated that the nexus approach had been helpful in changing the ESCWA approach in support of the Goals, which had, in turn, contributed to a more integrated and holistic contribution to the elaboration of national development plans.

42. This recommendation was implemented.

### III. Conclusion

43. ESCWA took important steps to implement the five recommendations in the OIOS evaluation, which led to the above-mentioned positive changes and outcomes.

44. The ESCWA Executive Committee had the flexibility to consider newly emerging priority areas in the region and unplanned requests for support. Significant progress had been made towards implementing publications reform and improving the dissemination and reach of ESCWA publications. However, due to changes in senior management, a comprehensive publications strategy had not yet been adopted.

45. In lieu of the recommended action plan or strategy, ESCWA had moved directly to amend its planning instructions to strengthen linkages between its core functions. At the same time, ESCWA had strengthened its methodologies for collecting, analysing and reporting on programme performance through an internal work planning portal and had established a dedicated unit on the 2030 Agenda.

*(Signed)* Fatoumata **Ndiaye**  
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services  
March 2020

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**Annex\*****Comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) welcomes the results reflected in the Triennial Review of the Implementation of Recommendations on the Programme evaluation of ESCWA conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and appreciates the occasion to examine progress.

ESCWA welcomes Recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 5 and notes that they have already been implemented.

ESCWA takes note of Recommendation 2, regarding the need for ESCWA to implement recommendations resulting from its current publication reform and further strengthen the utility of its publications by developing and implementing a comprehensive publications strategy. In this regard, ESCWA has been developing a new Publications Strategy over the past 3 months and is due to adopt the Strategy in the coming months. This will be communicated to OIOS in due course.

ESCWA looks forward to working with OIOS in the future.

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\* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.